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LETTER DATED 5 FEBRUARY 1999 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ERITREA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to transmit to you a press statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Eritrea on 5 February 1999 regarding Ethiopia's fabrication of an air attack (see annex I). I also transmit the text of an article posted from the Nairobi bureau of Reuters (see annex II).

I should be grateful if you would kindly circulate the text of the present letter and its annexes as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Haile MENKERIOS
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

Annex I

Press statement issued on 5 February 1999 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Eritrea

Ethiopia's fabrication of an air attack

The Ethiopian Government has today accused Eritrea of launching an air attack on Adigrat at 10.45 a.m. This is a complete fabrication.

But the design is clear. Because Ethiopia is planning to launch a full-scale war against Eritrea, it has been fabricating stories this week of Eritrea's "provocations and attacks". Thus, while it was Ethiopia that opened a new front in Tsorona (central Eritrea) by deploying about 55,000 troops, including the "elite" twentieth division, Ethiopia claimed earlier this week that "Eritrea had deployed troops in the Tsorona front to attack industrial cites in northern Tigray and the Obelisk in Aksum".

The fabricated story of an air strike against Adigrat falls into this pattern. Obviously, Ethiopia wants to break the moratorium on air strikes brokered by the United States of America on 14 June 1998. However, as the party that wants to break the moratorium has to inform the Government of the United States, Ethiopia prefers to fabricate a story than to inform the United States of its real intentions.

Eritrea remains on record as calling for an immediate cessation of all hostilities.

Annex II

Reuters article dated 5 February 1999

Ethiopia claims Eritrea bombs border town

By Tsegaye Tadesse

Addis Ababa, Feb 5 (Reuters) - Ethiopia said Eritrean fighter planes bombed a fuel depot in a northern town close to their disputed border on Friday but Eritrea flatly denied the allegation.

Ethiopian government spokeswoman Selome Taddesse said two Eritrean planes launched the attack at 10.45 a.m. (0745 GMT) on a fuel depot and the surrounding area in the small mountain town of Adigrat, about 30 km (20 miles) from the border with Eritrea.

Eritrean officials denied the reports and said Ethiopia was looking for an excuse to start its own cross-border attacks.

A hotel guest in the town said he had not heard any sound of explosion. "There is peace in Adigrat." he said by telephone.

Residents near the main airport in Asmara said they had not seen or heard any Eritrean military planes take off from the airport on Friday morning.